

Being Responsible in the Between: On William Desmond's Metaxology and Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Theology-of-the-Cross

Between Inseparability and Distinction

Metaxology is a discourse of the between: between unity and plurality, inseparability and distinction, sameness and otherness, identity and difference, self and others, the univocal and the equivocal. Metaxological philosophy is about being responsible, through faithful discourse, to both the promise of univocity and the promise of equivocity.¹ These concepts may sound abstract, yet the question must be asked: is it possible that William Desmond's metaxological metaphysics could be relevant for Christian theology? If so, the enigmatic character of this philosophy must first be made intelligible for theologians if it is ever to be considered relevant and appropriated.

Mindfulness towards Christian theology unveils several theological matters which paradoxically uphold both inseparability and distinction. For instance, in Trinitarian theology it is confessed that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three yet one; in Christology it is confessed that Jesus Christ is fully divine and fully human; in Soteriology it is confessed that humanity becomes one with God and yet remains creature; and in Ecclesiology, it is confessed that all followers

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¹ William Desmond, *Being and the Between* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), 178.

of Jesus Christ are the one body of Christ. These theological matters deal with the exact same issues of inseparability and distinction which metaxology carries a discourse between. It is with these issues in mind that this article intends to demonstrate that metaxology—as a hermeneutic of *passio essendi*—helps one be responsible in the between. Or in the theological terminology of Martin Luther and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, metaxology is closely associated with the theology-of-the-cross.

The ultimate hope is that this article will help theologians be responsible in the between, by utilizing metaxology and the theology-of-the-cross for contemporary challenges which concern both identity and difference, such as ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. In order to help theologians be responsible, firstly, I will make intelligible Desmond's philosophical "system" for theologians. This is done most easily by demonstrating how it illuminates Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theology-of-the-cross. Secondly, so as to remain faithful to the metaxological, I will demonstrate that Bonhoeffer's theology-of-the-cross in fact illuminates Desmond's metaxology. Indeed, in some ways, Bonhoeffer even seems to have been *more* metaxological than Desmond.

Bonhoeffer's theology-of-the-cross is not a confined doctrine of the atonement or the work done on the cross in itself (if it were, it would not be akin to the metaxological). His theology-of-the-cross is rather a hermeneutic for viewing all of reality. Specifically, it means to continually view all things through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and that these three may never be separated.² Furthermore, it also means to view Jesus Christ as being fully human and fully divine, and that the one Christ-reality is both the center (Mitte) and the mediator (Mittler). But even more, Bonhoeffer was incredibly existential in wanting to know who Jesus Christ was for today, and because of this, Bonhoeffer's doctrine of the church was nothing less than a community-of-the-cross, whereby this community is called to fully participate in all aspects of the one Christ-reality.

Sections 1-5 will espouse Desmond's metaxology, and section 6 will give a concrete praxis which goes more fully between Desmond and Bonhoeffer. The first 5 sections seek to elucidate Desmond primarily in his own right; however, occasionally, I do utilize Bonhoeffer to help illuminate Desmond. Pragmatically, this will serve to avoid getting too bogged down with Desmondian terminology.

² Bonhoeffer is in agreement with Luther's definition as well, for during the *Heidelberg Disputation of 1518*, Thesis 20 he stated that the theologian-of-the-cross is the person who views all things (including the resurrection) "through suffering and the cross."

Desmond is the primary interlocutor of this research. This is because I am of the conviction that metaxology needs to be made more accessible, especially for theologians. Bonhoeffer is the secondary interlocutor of this research, firstly, because Bonhoeffer's critique of Hegel was almost identical to Desmond's, and this parallel has never been addressed in literature. Secondly, "it is necessary to see Dietrich Bonhoeffer as a 20th century exemplar of what Martin Luther called the theology of the cross."³ Specifically, the contemporary context is in the wake of Hegel, therefore, it is more appropriate to address Bonhoeffer rather than Luther. Since explaining Desmond's metaxology requires substantial treatment, I will limit fully addressing Bonhoeffer and being responsible in the between, for the final section. This may seem like *too* much is devoted towards Desmond, however, I maintain this structure because Desmond needs to be explained, and because I have elsewhere written on Bonhoeffer for those who wish to study him in more depth.⁴

Excess and Lack

One could say that the metaxological journey begins in Plato's cave, because it teaches of both excess and lack. The hyperbolic givenness of the between throws itself beyond one's chained body onto the walls of the cave. As this prisoner is unchained and journeys away from the cave, they are blinded by an *excess* of light.⁵ Desmond uses this platonic imagery of being blinded through describing it with both Aristotle and Hegel. "[T]here is a blinding by the light. We are like bats at sunlight, as Aristotle said, not just like owls of Minerva in the equivocal

³ Douglas John Hall, "Seminar: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Ethics of Participation," (2004): 1, accessed October 10, 2014, http://www.ucalgary.ca/christchair/files/christchair/Hall_D.Bonhoeffer.pdf.

⁴ For more on Bonhoeffer and how I appropriate his theology-of-the-cross, refer to my articles, Michael Fletcher, "Is the Church Dead? Bonhoeffer's Theology-of-the-Cross and the Future of Ecumenical Ecclesiology," *Theologica Wratislaviensia* 11, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer na 500 lat Reformacji* (2016): 29-45; Michael Fletcher, "Bonhoeffer's Last Words, 'Our Victory Is Certain': Recognizing and Receiving the Ecumenical Church as a Present Reality" in *Beiheft zur Okumenischen Rundschau* 177, *Just Do It?! Recognition and Reception in Ecumenical Relations*, Proceedings of the 19th Academic Consultation of the Societas Oecumenica (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt GmbH, 2018): 393-404. Furthermore, my forthcoming PhD dissertation from KU Leuven addresses the Bonhoefferian aspects of this article in much greater detail. The tentative title is, *The Ecumene-of-the-Cross: A Bonhoefferian Response to the Ecumenical Problem as a Christological Problem*.

⁵ Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Allan Bloom, 2nd ed. (NY: Basic Books, 1991), I, 515d–516a.

twilight of falling dusk, as Hegel said.”⁶ The Aristotelian bat is blinded by excess, whereas the Hegelian owl is blinded by lack. Both “birds” are “blinded,”⁷ where neither blinding is trivial in Desmond’s philosophy.

Even so, Desmond is often found correcting Hegel’s lack. Hegel’s owl can only spread its wings at dusk, implying that philosophy is a historical journeying, where wisdom is groping blindly in the dark grey on grey.⁸ According to Hegel, the philosopher is blind because the *lack* of light and color, all is grey on grey.⁹ Hegelian philosophy cannot teach of the future or even allow for a future hope, for it is concerned with the rationality of the past.

Desmond and Bonhoeffer both correct Hegel, but neither disregard Hegel (Hegel is dealt with in detail in §5.3). Desmond understands that there are two blindings, that of the bat and that of the owl. The first blinding is from *excess*; similar to the prisoner leaving the cave. The second blinding is from *lack*; similar to the philosopher (re)entering the cave to go tell others what has been learned. In both cases, there is blind groping until vision is acclimated. In the second instance, the danger persists in forgetting that there is an origin of excess, this is Desmond’s (and Bonhoeffer’s) corrective of Hegel. Hegel has neglected the excess. The Morning Prayer for Hegel is always ever an Evening Prayer.¹⁰ Hegel’s prayer is reflective, though it ultimately bends back upon itself via the other, and not the other as the excessive agapeic origin.

A Hermeneutic of Desire

Desmond began his metaxological career with a thorough examination of the origins of desire, whether desire comes from lack or excess. One could say that

⁶ Desmond, *Being and the Between*, 138.

⁷ Nevertheless, bats are not birds and bats are not blinded by light because they are technically guided by sonar.

⁸ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, “The Philosophy of Right,” in *Great Book of the Western World*, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins, (Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1952), 46; 7.

⁹ William Desmond, *Philosophy and Its Others: Ways of Being and Mind*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990), 220. Ironically, bats are the ones that actually see in grey on grey, not owls. All allegories fall apart at some point.

¹⁰ Hegel said, “reading the morning paper is the realist’s morning prayer. One orients one’s attitude toward the world either by God, or what the world is.” Hegel, *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel*, in *Spec Studies in Historical Philosophy*, ed. Jon Stewart, (IL: Northwestern University Press, 2000), 247. The morning paper only contains the past events, thus this morning prayer is always groping through the grey on grey.

metaxology is a “hermeneutic of desire.”¹¹ Does desire arise because of lack or because of excess? Is desire based off of astonishment or off of a perplexity?¹² Astonishment leaves one in mysterious awe from excess. Perplexity on the other hand is a type of self-acknowledgment in that the person comes to sense a type of lack. The self can no longer see outside of the self. There is both excess and lack within desire, though lack often overrules. Childlike astonishment can turn into childish perplexity. One of Desmond’s goals is “to consider the resurrection of astonishment and perplexity...”¹³ This “resurrection”, the renewed thought concerning both excess and lack, plenty and poverty, is found in Desmond’s paradoxical “dark radiance.”¹⁴

The dark radiance, and the resurrection of astonishment and perplexity, is understood through a Desmondian understanding of *agape* and *eros*. Anders Nygren created a dualistic opposition between *agape* and *eros*, and whenever *agape* is used to overcome *eros*, one can usually trace that to Nygren.¹⁵ In reading Desmond, it is not so implausible to interpret that he is using *agape* to overcome *eros*,¹⁶ because Desmond often speaks negatively of *eros*. However, to be more precise, Desmond is in actuality speaking negatively of the *erotic absolute*. Because of this negativity, one could easily disregard that Desmond speaks positively about *erotic perplexity*. Desmond is not using *agape* to overcome *eros*; rather, he is reuniting *eros* with its parents.¹⁷

Eros’ reunion with its parents is demonstrated through Desmond’s retelling of the story of Eros’ conception. Desmond’s reading of Eros contains within

¹¹ William Desmond, *Desire, Dialectic, and Otherness: An Essay on Origins* (Chelsea, MI: Yale University Press, 1987), 9. See William Desmond, *Perplexity and Ultimacy: Metaphysical Thoughts From the Middle* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), 21.

¹² Desmond, *Being and the Between*, 20.

¹³ William Desmond, *The Intimate Strangeness of Being: Metaphysics After Dialectic* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 293. And again, “Our aging, even our dying, can be a different beginning, a different birth—rebirth of the *agapeic* astonishment before the glory of creation.” See Desmond, *Being and the Between*, 297.

¹⁴ William Desmond, *God and the Between* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2008), 340.

¹⁵ Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson, Revised (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1953).

¹⁶ For instance, even the respected scholar Joris Geldhof seems to have interpreted Desmond as being in alignment with Nygren. “It is possible [unlike Desmond], however, not to conceive of *eros* and *agape* in terms of a sharp contrast, but to consider them complimentary.” Joris Geldhof, “The Between and the Liturgy: On Rendering W. Desmond’s Philosophy Fruitful for Theology,” in *Between Philosophy and Theology: Contemporary Interpretations of Christianity*, ed. Lieven Boeve and Christophe Brabant (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2010), 92.

¹⁷ For further discussion see Desmond, *Perplexity and Ultimacy*, 104-105.

it a duality, that of *Poros* and *Penia*, resource and poverty.¹⁸ The conceiving of Eros happened during a feast of the gods, whereupon Poros was inebriated on nectar and seduced by Penia, who conceived the child Eros. Eros is the love-child of *plenty* and *lack*. Thus, he lacks because of his mother; however, he is also overflowing with abundance because of his father. Eros was a *daimon*—a between being.¹⁹ The divine festivity, coupled with the resourceful Poros, represents an overflowing abundance; an agapeic and hyperbolic excessive givenness.

Poros is eternally resourceful, thus Poros never lacks. Because Eros is conceived of *resource*, it is imitative and resourceful like its father, Poros. However, Eros' mother Penia is always lacking in her poverty and Eros is also imitative of its lacking mother. Eros, as a between being, occupies a special space between resource and poverty. Eros is more than imitative of its parents, for in the between space, Eros is also able to be creative in a sense. Eros is able to transcend *lack*. *Lack* cannot go beyond *lack*, only *excess* can go beyond *lack*. However, *excess* cannot go beyond *lack* unless it has *lack*, which *excess* will never have. This is why Eros is so vital. Poros as Poros cannot transcend lack, for Poros is always resourceful, thus never experiencing lack. Eros cannot transcend lack apart from the prior excess which it has been granted.

"We must say that erotic perplexity is born from agapeic astonishment."²⁰ Desire from lack is not necessarily a bad thing, the danger comes with the "amnesia of its own birth;"²¹ this is when the monster is born, and Hegel's erotic absolute overtakes. In other words, the Platonic *eros* is always a between, whereas, the Hegelian *eros* always emphasizes lack and therefore returns the self to the self, albeit via the other. This is also known as what Bonhoeffer calls the "heavenly double" or what Desmond calls the "counterfeit double."

Bonhoeffer gives wonderful pragmatic insight into this type of erotic and agapeic love in a letter he wrote to Eberhard Bethge, his best friend and biographer, on May 20, 1944. Bethge had voiced concern that his thoughts were occupied with his love for Renata, his wife, and that, in a sense, it could be taking away from his love towards God. Dietrich responded,

¹⁸ Desmond, *Desire, Dialectic and Otherness*, 211, note no. 14.

¹⁹ Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Seth Benardete (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 1; 202b–203a.

²⁰ Desmond, *Being and the Between*, 14.

²¹ Ibid. "Let us not forget the crucial ambiguity in the transition from agapeic astonishment to erotic perplexity—namely, the birth of the latter out of the former, but the possible forgetting of the former in the latter's sense of lack or ignorance." Ibid., 16.

There is a danger, in any passionate erotic love, that through it you may lose what I'd like to call the polyphony of life. What I mean is that God, the Eternal, wants to be loved with our whole heart, not to the detriment of earthly love or to diminish it, but as a sort of *cantus firmus* to which the other voices of life resound in counterpoint.²²

Bonhoeffer and Bethge were both musicians—Dietrich almost became a professional musician but decided to become a theologian instead—so it makes sense that he could write with such musical metaphors. The *cantus firmus* (lit. “fixed song”) is the preexisting melody which forms the basis of a polyphonic composition, where a polyphonic composition has two or more simultaneous lines of independent melody. The most beautiful polyphonic songs need counterpoint if they are to be truly beautiful, and they are held together by the *cantus firmus*. Bonhoeffer knew this and he likened the *cantus firmus* to a type of agapeic excess of love poured into our hearts by God, and the counterpoint to a type of erotic perplexity of human love shared among one another. Both elements are absolutely vital. This “polyphony of life” is nothing less than a simplified way of describing what Bonhoeffer also called the ultimate and penultimate things, and that these are related to each other through desire as both excessive and lacking.

According to Desmond, and Bonhoeffer, the Platonic *eros* is always a between, whereas, the Hegelian *eros* always emphasizes lack and therefore returns Myself to Myself, albeit via an “other.” This would be the case if one had forgotten about the *cantus firmus*. It is now with mindfulness of desire as both lack and plenty that we discuss the “being” of God.

The Analogy of Relation

Is Desmond reestablishing a type of analogy of being? Persons such as John Milbank interpret him in this way.²³ However, if he is doing something different, then the question we must ask is, “what separates Desmond’s thinking of the between from the metaphysics of analogy in Aquinas?”²⁴ John Caputo interprets the metaxological to be different than this classical metaphysics of analogy for the

²² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *DBWE 08, Letters and Papers From Prison*, ed. John W. de Gruchy, trans. Isabel Best (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), DBWE 8:393-394.

²³ John Milbank, “The Double Glory,” in Slavoj Žizek and John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic*, ed. Creston Davis (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), 110-233.

²⁴ John Caputo, “Foreword,” in William Desmond, *The William Desmond Reader*, ed. Christopher Ben Simpson (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2012), vii.

same reasons as myself, namely, “it emphasizes the concrete and experiential...”²⁵ This does not mean that Desmond is denying classical metaphysics in the slightest, but rather, his journey is saturated with a type of phenomenology of experience and relation, which I see to be in perfect agreement with what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called the analogy of relation in his lecture series on *Creation and Fall*.

In *God and the Between*, Desmond uses the phrase “God being over-being” to convey that God’s overdetermined excess enables the ethos of being. “God is not the between or a being in the between but hyperbolic,”²⁶ and the hyperbolic excess is blinding. How does one discuss this “dark radiance”? The best way is to describe it in terms of the relational imagery which Desmond paints in the last paragraph of *God and the Between*,

Our end is in that dark light. And in that dark light we end. There is a ‘being nothing’ that purges our clogged porosity, letting us differently sojourn in the between. In an ultimate patience, I am nothing, the other is more than enough to fill the heart, there is nothing between us, nothing but the enabling between ...There is nothing empty about the nothing we have become.²⁷

This imagery of *nothing* is strikingly similar to the type of imagery which Bonhoeffer used in order to describe creation, freedom, and the analogy of relation (which he proposed in contradistinction to the analogy of being).

Between Creator and creature there is simply nothing. Therefore, creation is one of freedom, there is no necessity when there is nothing between them...and thus, it is a creation *ex nihilo*....[There is] no kind of necessity....Creation comes out of nothing.²⁸

Bonhoeffer is here describing the classical doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* in terms of the nothing between the Creator and the creature. And because there is nothing, the creation can be one of absolute freedom. Contra Hegelian necessity, Bonhoeffer is claiming absolute freedom on God’s part. And contra (his interpretation of) Barth, he is claiming that God’s freedom is not merely a freedom *from*, but a freedom *for*. And following this, the creature, created in the image of God, is likewise free *for* the other. This is the analogy of relation. The reason Bonhoeffer cannot maintain the unmovable orders of creation is because

²⁵ Ibid., vii.

²⁶ Desmond, *God and the Between*, 288.

²⁷ Ibid., 340.

²⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *DBWE 03, Creation and Fall*, ed. John W. de Gruchy, trans. Douglas S. Bax (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), DBWE 3:32.

these orders would end up espousing necessity on God's part, not freedom. God creates out of freedom, and he continues to uphold out of freedom.

God is the giver of the primal ethos, the milieu of being in which all beings come to be, "the enabling milieu."²⁹ This milieu can also be referred to as "the between." As I quoted earlier, "God is not the between or a being in the between but hyperbolic."³⁰ God, as the agapeic origin, gives the milieu to be, and God is always hyperbolic with respect to the milieu.³¹ God gifts the between, but is always hyperbolic to the between. God exceeds the between as agapeic origin. All beings exist within the between and are gifted to be between beings. Being is granted, and unfortunately taken for granted on many occasions.³²

If God grants beings to be, it means that God is more than being. Desmond states that "God is another dimension"³³ to the between. This other dimensionality is no surprise if we remember that Desmond repeatedly suggest in part IV of *God and the Between* that God is *over-being*.³⁴ What does Desmond mean by *over* in over-being? Cyril O'Regan writes, "'Over' is Desmond's version of the Greek *hyper*, the Latin *super*, and the German *über*."³⁵ Over-being is "the actualizing origin that is the actual possibilizing ground of all possible being."³⁶ Nothing has being except through the givenness which has been enabled and granted through the over-being. God is over-being, and because beings are between beings, God is over-the-between.

Bonhoeffer, like Desmond, often referred to humans as between beings (primarily in *Act and Being* and *Creation and Fall*). The following excerpt from Bonhoeffer's *Creation and Fall* helps explain one's being in the between and God's relation to it. When reading it, we need to keep in mind that for Bonhoeffer, "the beginning" has nothing to do with Euclidean or Newtonian temporality; "in the beginning" means "out of freedom and out of nothing."³⁷ The following was written by Bonhoeffer, though it reads as something Desmond himself could have written.

²⁹ Ibid., 3.

³⁰ Ibid., 288.

³¹ Without this distinction we risk Spinozistic monism or Hegelian pan(en)theism.

³² "We live in this manifestation and take it for granted, but then we take for granted the fact that it is granted, and that it is also a granting of itself." Desmond, *God and the Between*, 12.

³³ Ibid., 4.

³⁴ See Desmond, *God and the Between*, Part IV.

³⁵ Cyril O'Regan, "Naming God in God and the Between," *Louvain Studies* 36 (2012): 283, doi:10.2143/LS.36.2.2979762.

³⁶ Desmond, *God and the Between*, 285.

³⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, DBWE 3:36.

In the beginning God created heaven and earth. Not that first God was and then God created, but that in the beginning God created. This beginning is the beginning in the anxiety-causing middle and at the same time beyond the anxiety-causing middle in which we have our being. We do not know of this beginning by stepping out of the middle and becoming a beginning ourselves. Because we could accomplish that only by means of a lie, we would then certainly not be in the beginning but only in the middle that is disguised by a lie. This needs to be kept clearly in mind in everything that follows. It is only in the middle that we come to learn about the beginning.³⁸

Only by truly recognizing oneself in the middle, the real-center, does one come to learn about real-freedom. But pragmatically speaking, how does one be patient and responsible in the middle, for it does cause anxiety? No matter what, one is in the anxiety-causing middle. And Desmond and Bonhoeffer would likely agree with Kierkegaard, in the name of Vigilius Haufniensis, “whoever has learned to be anxious in the right way has learned the ultimate.”³⁹ In order to abide and be responsible in the anxiety-causing middle, one needs to learn how to die, hence, the theology-of-the-cross. But we are not yet able to describe this death. We first turn to examining the tension between transcendence and autonomy.

Transcendence and Autonomy

Transcendence and autonomy both have the ability to create core problems in both philosophy and theology. On the one hand, modern philosophy of the autonomous subject promotes the subject as a self-transcending subject able to determine its own self-law, which is not a bad thing in itself. However, the subject can forget that the ability to determine the self-law was enabled from a superior transcendence. When this amnesia occurs, the autonomous subject determinately fixes its self-law as absolute, and “superior” transcendence becomes relative.⁴⁰ On the other hand, if God is held so high as to be completely transcendent, it can convey the message that a chasm exists between God and the subjective individual, leaving the subject permanently detached from an

³⁸ Ibid., DBWE 3:30–31.

³⁹ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Oriented Deliberation in View of the Dogmatic Problem of Hereditary Sin*, trans. Alastair Hannay (NY: Liveright Publishing Corporation a Division of W.W. Norton & Company, 2014), 187. And adding to this, later on in the book, in the third to last sentence, he writes, “Therefore, the person who, in respect of guilt, is *educated by anxiety* will rest only in the Atonement.” (p. 196) Emphasis added.

⁴⁰ “And so it goes: metaphysical and scientific univocity collude in the domestication of ultimate transcendence.” Desmond, *BB*, 236.

eternally silent God. If superior transcendence is taken as absolute, then self-law which the subjective individual makes can only be relative at best.⁴¹ If God is *over-being* and subjective individuals are enabled to be between beings, does this change how autonomy and transcendence are appropriated?

Desmond answers this antinomy between autonomy and transcendence through the three senses of transcendence: the transcendence of *the exterior*, *the interior*, and *the superior*. The three senses of transcendence implicitly take their shape in Desmond's early thoughts in *Desire, Dialectic and Otherness*, as an adaptation from Augustine which I alluded to earlier.

Overall, we follow an itinerary reminiscent of St. Augustine's description of the double movement of his own thought. According to him, *ab exterioribus ad interiora, ab inferioribus ad superiora*....This work exhibits aspects of what might be called an Augustinian odyssey, embarked on in the wake of Hegel....from exterior to interior...from interior to superior.⁴²

This Augustinian odyssey is also a Bonhoefferian odyssey, for he wrote about this type of double movement of thought by writing, "All thinking always refers to something transcendent in two ways: retrospectively and prospectively."⁴³ The suspension between these two is why Bonhoeffer could refer to humans as between beings.

In the previous excerpt from Desmond, neither the word "transcendence" nor "three" were mentioned, but the ideas are implicit, embedded as an external going beyond itself to grant something to the interior self, and in part the interior self then internalizes what has been granted to then go beyond itself as inferior and (re)turn to the superior.⁴⁴ The double movement—from exterior to interior and from inferior to superior—evolves and takes on an explicit threefold sense of transcendence in Desmond's following books, in which he refers to their interactions in multiple ways: exterior-interior-superior; nature-self-God; first-

⁴¹ "This is the antinomy: if autonomy is absolute, third transcendence has to be relativized; if third transcendence is absolute, autonomy must be relativized." William Desmond, *Hegel's God: A Counterfeit Double* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd, 2005), 4. Abbreviated title: *HG*.

⁴² Desmond, *DDO*, 13–14.

⁴³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *DBWE 02, Act and Being: Transcendental Philosophy and Ontology in Systematic Theology*, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd and Hans-Richard Reuter, trans. Martin Rumscheidt (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), DBWE 2:34. Abbreviated title: *A&B*.

⁴⁴ "Metaxological metaphysics must think the doubleness of this tension between being in the midst *and* being referred by self-transcendence to the transcendence of what is other, what is over and above." Desmond, *BB*, 44.

second-third transcendences; T1-T2-T3.⁴⁵ God is not the only transcendence: transcendence has three senses, for “*trans* is a going beyond or across towards what is not now oneself.”⁴⁶ *Nature* does this, the *self* does this, and *God* does this. God is the *only* transcendent One in the hyperbolic sense of granting being. However, God is not the *only* transcendent one. Transcendence is a matter of remaining true to the self as well as true to the other;⁴⁷ it also helps establish the relation with God.

T3 is the enabling transcendence for both T1 and T2. If T3 is the superior, T3 makes itself known through T1 and T2 in immanence, thus, *though it is absolutely transcendent, it is not absolutely transcendent*.⁴⁸ Or as Bonhoeffer wrote, “God’s ‘beyond’ is not what is beyond our cognition! Epistemological transcendence has nothing to do with God’s transcendence. God is the beyond in the midst of our lives.”⁴⁹

T3 as enabling transcendence for T1 and T2 does not “prove” the existence of T3, a proof would reduce a mindfulness of what exceeds and enables the between to a univocal affair. It is attentiveness to T1 and T2 which makes one aware that there is an excess which cannot be explained in terms of immanence alone. T3 is not proven, but rather grasped and witnessed to through mindfulness to the hyperboles of being.

With modernity, T3 has been sidelined—pushed to the extreme limits of transcendence outside of immanence—primarily because of the antinomies between autonomy and transcendence. Proofs for God’s existence were used to secure the self, therefore God was shown to be a moment in securing the self’s place in the world. God being over-the-between enables a transcendent relatedness with beings. Because of this relatedness with beings, the three senses

⁴⁵ “We need to distinguish at least these three kinds of transcendence, roughly corresponding to the other-being of nature, of the human self, and of the divine. I will use the shorthand T1, T2, T3. What is important is not only their character but their interrelation.” Desmond, *HG*, 2.

⁴⁶ Desmond, *HG*, 4.

⁴⁷ “I now call notice to a double unfolding that causes us to move from one sense to the next, as a more adequate effort to think through the truth of the happening of being. The double unfolding has to do, first with the *self-coherence* of the specific mode of being and mind, and second with its *truthfulness to what is other* to thought.” Desmond, *BB*, xiv.

⁴⁸ “Manifested transcendence is in immanence and hence not absolutely transcendent; and yet it is absolutely transcendent as revealed in immanence, for what is revealed is ever beyond encapsulation, even in immanence itself.” Desmond, *BB*, 219.

⁴⁹ Bonhoeffer, *LPP*, DBWE 8:367.

of transcendence help bring clarity to being itself through four senses.⁵⁰ These four senses of being which will be discussed in section 5, are “signs in immanence of what transcends immanence and cannot be fully determined in immanent terms.”⁵¹ For now, we turn to discuss the *passio essendi*.

A Hermeneutic of *Passio Essendi*

These signs in immanence are incarnated because “transcendence comes to us as an advent; this is the patience of an original opening.”⁵² In waiting for the incarnated advent, patience can wear thin.⁵³ When T3 is silent, the self seeks to make determinate that which is indeterminate. Impatient beings seek to give birth to their own autonomous selves. However, “self-transcending (T2) is first energized by the given endowment of the *passio essendi*, and only then by the endeavor of the *conatus essendi*.”⁵⁴ The *conatus essendi*, the endeavor of being, is no longer mindful of its *co-natus*, the co-birth.⁵⁵ Self-transcendence is not with-birth apart from being patient to receive the incarnated gifting and enabling from divine transcendence, from God being over-the-between.

Autonomous individuals have a tendency to take for themselves rather than to receive the granted incarnation. They take the body rather than receive the body, because they forget that “the *conatus* points back to the *passio*, as well as carrying it forward.”⁵⁶ *Passio* is both a patience and a suffering: it is a true tolerance. When there is refusal to be patient, there is refusal to suffer, thus the *conatus* is neglected, even though the *endeavor to be* was the focus in the refusal to be patient.⁵⁷ When patience is refused, the self stays “true” only to the self, but this staying “true” is not true at all because it refuses to witness to the superior transcendence which grants being in the first place.

⁵⁰ “Transcendence as other to us works along with human self-transcendence....I propose to give concrete articulation to the suggestion in terms of the four senses of being: the univocal, the equivocal, the dialectical and the metaxological.” Desmond, *BB*, 5.

⁵¹ Desmond, *GB*, 8.

⁵² Desmond, *BB*, 5.

⁵³ See Desmond, *GB*, 19.

⁵⁴ Desmond, *GB*, 24.

⁵⁵ Desmond takes advantage of the dual meaning implied within *Conatus*. Namely, he takes it to mean *conari* (try, endeavor, strive) as well as *co-natus* (co-birth).

⁵⁶ Desmond, *GB*, 34.

⁵⁷ “Does our understanding of our own self-transcending rely too much on the *conatus essendi* and not enough on the *passio essendi*.” Desmond, *GB*, 22.

Without patience, people either try to force their ideal of the ultimate into the penultimate (and thereby show hostility towards God) or they turn their ideal of penultimate into the ultimate (and thereby show hostility towards this-world). Upholding both penultimate and ultimate things, in and with patience, is a precarious and risky endeavor to be, and Bonhoeffer describes this by writing, “human beings could certainly once again *attempt* to move away from the *middle* that causes them *anxiety* and become a *beginning* themselves. They could *endeavor* to think of this nothing as something that in turn gives *birth* to creation.”⁵⁸ Bonhoeffer and Desmond both see how, in the Hegelian system, one tries to find one’s own beginning and give birth to itself, by leaving the *middle*. However, this is a lie to ourselves, for “we ourselves are in the middle.”⁵⁹

Earlier metaxology was addressed as being a “hermeneutic of desire.”⁶⁰ It is now appropriate to handle this desire in writing that *metaxology is a hermeneutic of passio essendi*. By using this interpretive key, one is able to properly appropriate the four senses of being and dispel misinterpretations of the univocal, equivocal, and dialectical senses of being as “bad” and the metaxological as “good.”⁶¹ Thus, the four senses of being are interpreted through the *passio essendi*, and this will help us, as theologians, learn how to be responsible in the between.

On Closed System and Faithful Discourse of the Between

Thus far, I refrained from beginning with the fourfold senses of being, because focusing on this “system” at the beginning can detract from God as over-being.⁶² “There is no claim to a closed system. System is for me an after-the-fact articulation of the matter that must be allowed to take its own shape. System does not dictate to the unfolding matter what form it should take.”⁶³ As can be seen, Desmond is not opposed to system, so long as the system is not determinately fixed and dictating the form. However, could not the repeated usage of the terms pertaining the univocal, equivocal, dialectical and metaxological, and the form they take, make one believe that it is a closed system? Christopher Ben Simpson

⁵⁸ Bonhoeffer, *C and F*, DBWE 3:33. Emphasis added.

⁵⁹ Ibid., DBWE 3:30

⁶⁰ Desmond, *DDO*, 9. See Desmond, *PU*, 9, 21.

⁶¹ It is true that Desmond often writes against the univocal, the equivocal, and the dialectical; however, his words must be taken in context.

⁶² “There is no claim to a closed system. System is for me an after-the-fact articulation of the matter that must be allowed to take its own shape. System does not dictate to the unfolding matter what form it should take.” Desmond, *PU*, 10.

⁶³ Ibid.

does not write that metaxology is a closed system, but he does write that “Desmond *begins* his metaphysics with the “how” of metaphysics.”⁶⁴ However, if Desmond *begins* his metaphysics with the “how,” then has not Desmond created a closed system or a “logic,”⁶⁵ as Simpson labels it? In other words, beginning with “how” seems to dictate the unfolding of its form in “how” it is done, thus creating a closed system.

Beginning with the “how” undoes the hermeneutic of desire and *passio essendi* because there is no longer a faithful discourse of the between, between self and the other, but only the univocal affair of the “how.” If the fourfold is treated as the “how,” then one could *logically* conclude, like Simpson, that “Desmond moves from the “how” of metaphysics [the fourfold]...to the “what” of metaphysics...its objects (the three transcendences).”⁶⁶ However, the three transcendences are not an objectifiable “what.” Desmond himself stresses against “what.” “Not *what* they are, but *that* they are at all, is the marvel of metaphysical mindfulness.”⁶⁷

In one way or another, Simpson’s systematization (“how” and “logic”) and objectification (“what”) has failed to confirm the double movement of fidelity between self and others, thus, it is no longer a discourse of the between. Rather, it absolutizes the metaxological in the same way that Hegel absolutizes the dialectical.

It is arguable that metaxology is often expressed through the three transcendences and the fourfold senses of being, and that Desmond’s writings confirm this. However, the three and the four cannot be relegated to the “how” and the “what.” The four senses of being are not “how” to do metaphysics; rather they are the hyperbolic senses of being which are gifts from superior transcendence made known as signs in immanence through faithful discourse in and of the between.

Metaxological Being

Being mindful to the previous disclaimers and maintaining fidelity to the givenness, the poetic system of being now emerges through the univocal, equivocal, dialectical, and metaxological senses. Vigilance is used in appropriating each sense through the hermeneutic of the *passio essendi*.

⁶⁴ Christopher Ben Simpson, *Religion, Metaphysics, and the Postmodern: William Desmond and John D. Caputo*, Indiana Series in the Philosophy of Religion (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009), 28. Emphasis mine.

⁶⁵ Ibid. Though Simpson does credit Desmond with not calling it a “logic.”

⁶⁶ Ibid., 45.

⁶⁷ Desmond, *BB*, 225. Emphasis mine.

The Idiocy of Being

The first sense of being is the univocal. The etymological definition of “univocal” means “having only one voice.” Desmond’s usage implies this etymological definition, as the following excerpt demonstrates.

The first sense, the *univocal* puts the emphasis on simple sameness, hence on the unmediated unity of the self and the other. The univocal sense has its place in our efforts to make sense of being but its unmediated sense of unity cannot do proper justice to the complex *differences* between philosophy and its others.⁶⁸

One-voice necessitates this simple sameness because there is reduction between the self and the other, where they coalesce into a type of simple sameness. There is only one voice. The univocal is the “*that it is at all*” of being. In having one voice, univocity seeks identification and intelligibility. Can the self obtain this intelligibility and know the “that it is” without fixing it to determinacy? The hermeneutic of *passio essendi* reveals the answer.

If there is no *passio essendi*, then T2 (human-self) views all of T1 (nature) and God (T3) as indeterminate and seeks to determinately fix them, because the impatience of being demands fixing determinate intelligibility and univocal sameness. In trying to determinately fix nature and God with mathematical univocity, nature and God are lost. When T3 is silent and not perceivable, we nonetheless seek determinate intelligibility, thus T1 becomes equated with T3 and we are left with an absorbing God. Nature and God, and a type of monism. If there is no *passio essendi* within the univocal sense of being, then the *conatus essendi* is entirely trivial, for the lack of patience towards T1 and T3 means there can be no co-natus, no co-birth, for all birth is only self-same birth. The “that it is at all” becomes the “all that is.” Identification and intelligibility are both wonderful things granted to the self; however, the self does not always allow these wonderful things to be *full-of-wonder* because it takes them for granted if patience is lacking.

If, on the other hand, there is *passio essendi*, then the univocal sense of being sheds new light on what it means to be the “*that it is*” at all. Desmond refers to this as the idiotic, in the intimately personal sense of the etymology where there is actually idiot wisdom. This type of idiotic univocal sameness is made known, though it remains mysteriously indeterminate nonetheless. The knowability of the sameness is granted from T3, thus, there is a realization that there is not a complete determinate self-same unity throughout the cosmos. As Augustine

⁶⁸ Desmond, *PO*, 4.

said, "God is more intimate to me than I am to myself."⁶⁹ The idiotic sense of being is true to the self and true to the other, even in its simplicity of being the "that it is." In being true to the self and the other, the idiotic self realizes that there is more than simple sameness, though it knows the importance of the intimately idiotic self. "To recognize that we need more than the univocal sense of being does not mean that we deny the need for the univocal sense, nor that it lacks its proper jurisdiction...."⁷⁰ Univocity is a good thing, if it patiently remembers that the "that it is" was granted to be from the enabling agapeic origin. Without the idiocy of being there can be no aesthetics of happening, to which we now turn.

The Aesthetics of Happening

As stated, the idiotic sense realizes that in being true to itself and to the other, that their must necessarily be other(s), this otherness brings us to the equivocal sense. "By contrast (with the univocal), the *equivocal* sense breaks with the ideal of univocal unity and stresses those aspects of unmediated *difference* between the self and the other."⁷¹ The etymology reveals that equivocality means "of equal voice." It would be a gross misunderstanding to equate "of equal voice" to mean "one-voice," especially given that Desmond is stressing the "unmediated" aspect of the equivocal. Two voices can only be equal if and only if they are other to each other, if they are not other to each other, then they are simply univocally the same. Because the voices are "equal," the equivocal is often realized through dualisms or antinomies. It is crucial to (re)cognize the *unmediated* otherness of the equivocal.

What is the role of the *passio essendi* as it pertains to the equivocal? If the equivocal sense of being refuses to have patience, then the outcome is a discontinuous plurality.⁷² If all things are discontinuous and there is no continuity, then T3 is completely other, completely transcendent and unknowable. In an impatient oppositional Cartesian dualism, "we conquer our bodies with our minds; we conquer the aesthetic givenness of the world with the mathematical dianoetics of our science and technology."⁷³ In other words, though the other is perceived (*aesthetics*), it is not determinately understood. If the other is not

⁶⁹ See Augustine, *Confessions* 3.6.11. "tu autem eras interior intimo meo et superior summo meo." *Interior intimo meo* may be translated as "more intimate to me than I am to myself."

⁷⁰ Desmond, *BB*, 127.

⁷¹ Desmond, *PO*, 4. Emphasis mine.

⁷² Desmond refers to this type of discontinuous plurality as "Wittgensteinian." See Desmond, *PO*, Introductory chapter, and also see Desmond, *PU*, 12.

⁷³ Desmond, *GB*, 64.

determinately understood, then conquering it is a viable option. This conquering happens when there is no *passio* for the aesthetic.

An example from the movie *Equilibrium* does the best to illustrate this point:⁷⁴ The setting is 2072 in a post-World War III society. A totalitarian regime assumes world power and in their efforts to assume authority, they suppress all human emotions and desires through the forced usage of the drug called Prozum, the “opiate of our masses.” This drug is their salvation because it delivers them from all emotion, and thus any future wars. In the film there are law enforcers (called Clerics!) who kill any and all offenders, “sense offenders.” Thus persons caught with any form of art or expressing any emotions count as the sense offenders and are killed immediately.

One of the sense offending characters in the film quotes W.B. Yeats, before he is shot and killed: “But I, being poor, have only my dreams. I have spread my dreams under your feet. Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.” The aesthetic was not tolerated. There was no *passio* for the aesthetic. As Desmond writes, “the equivocal is nowhere more evident than in human desire,”⁷⁵ and human desire is nothing without the aesthetic. Mindfulness reveals that the other has laid down their dreams underneath the feet of the self, and it is the self’s role to tread softly and patiently, for the others are poor and have only their dreams. This example has taken the equivocal to an extreme and shows how the equivocal can be a terrible thing when taken to its limits and the *passio essendi* is forgotten. Art, the aesthetic, has the power to (re)fuel our perception of others.⁷⁶

If, however, there is *passio essendi* within the equivocal sense, then we discover that “equivocity is not always just our failure of univocal logic, but is rooted in the character of being itself.”⁷⁷ When rooted in being itself, the equivocal is the aesthetics of happening. The coming to pass of the senses of sensing the other. If the self is true to the senses, then the other is sensed and the self is given opportunity to be true to the other. However, if you “remove the paint of Rome [then] you undo her.”⁷⁸ The *passio essendi* brings out the equivocal aesthetics of happening in being able to sense the other, while also maintaining the univocal

⁷⁴ Kurt Wimmer, *Equilibrium*, Film, 2003.

⁷⁵ Desmond, *BB*, 110.

⁷⁶ Desmond, *GB*, 38.

⁷⁷ Desmond, *BB*, 88. “I want to propose that aesthetic appearing [of being] is equivocal in terms that are not merely negative.” Desmond, *BB*, 89.

⁷⁸ Regina Maria Schwartz, *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism. When God Left the World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 31. Schwartz is quoting Aston, *England’s Iconoclasts*, 6. In this quote there is here an intrinsic connection between the aesthetic, the religious, and the ethical.

idiotic singularity of the self. It allows the self to be true to the self and the others. Now we turn to see if there is a dialectical mediation of the equivocal which brings about a higher unity of sorts while not sacrifice the idiocy of being.

The Erotics of Selving

In order to discuss the erotics of selving, it is crucial to discuss the form of dialectic proposed by Hegel, where his dialectic not only contains epistemology, but also ontology, hence “the real is rational and the rational is real.”⁷⁹ To clear Hegel of fraudulent charges, it is a gross misrepresentation of Hegel to say that his dialectic is the formulaic idea of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. These terms are better attributed to Fichte.⁸⁰ However, Hegel’s system did have a threefold rhythmic heartbeat which continued to build upon itself, until ultimately reaching the final Absolute Spirit. If this is the case, does this not mean that his system turned into the univocal identity which he sought to avoid, the very thing which he critiqued in his contemporary Friedrich Schelling?⁸¹

Hegel often employs the analogy of the plant, where the concept is in the germ (i.e., potentiality). Hegel focused on immediacy and immanence in the first stage. From this immediacy we discover, in stage two, that the concept’s ascending movement contradicts itself. “The dialectic of concept consists not in simply producing the determination as a contrary and restriction, but in producing and seizing upon the positive content and outcome of the determination, because it is this which makes it solely a development and immanent progress.”⁸² In the third stage, the resolution necessarily arises.⁸³ The fascinating feature of Hegel’s dialectic is that it necessarily arises out of itself—out of the concept—and nothing external to the thing itself.⁸⁴ His system is rational in the sense that the rationality emerges from the thing, rather than coming from an outside rationality. If the Absolute truly exists and it has the structure of conceptual necessity, then we can

⁷⁹ Hegel, “The Philosophy of Right,” preface.

⁸⁰ Frederick Charles Copleston, “Hegel,” in *A History of Philosophy*, (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1962), 7; 177.

⁸¹ “If being is always being and nothingness always nothingness, there is no becoming.” Julian Marias, *History of Philosophy*, trans. Stanley Appelbaum and Clarence C. Strowbridge, (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1967), 322.

⁸² Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, sec. 31.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ “To consider a thing rationally means not to bring reason to bear on the object from the outside and so tamper with it, but to find that the object is rational on its own account.” Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, sec. 31.

derive it through a purely conceptual argument, where the concept will bring about its own incoherence and indispensability. Thus, concept must necessarily be an ascending dialectic.

A central theme of Hegelian philosophy is that the "Spirit comes to know himself....it must grow through struggle to self-knowledge."⁸⁵ If there is truly this ascending dialectic, then the answers are found within the things themselves, not simply in one's own reasoning of these things. This is why one can say that Hegel's system contains "self-thinking thought" or "thought thinking itself." Also embedded within Hegel's dialectic, one may also say it is "thought thinking itself and its others;"⁸⁶ however, Desmond criticizes Hegel, for even though thought does think of its other, the other has been redefined relatively to the self. Namely, if the ascending dialectic converges upon the Absolute by necessity, and if this is the self-coming to know itself, then this means that the Absolute (T3) has actually been redefined in terms of the self (T2).⁸⁷ Thus, *all transcendence is immanent*.

Hegelian dialectic in all its glory encapsulates the Absolute Idea as the final synthesis of the dialectical process, thus ending the process and requiring that this whole system be grossly self-determined or self-mediated—reducing everything to a univocal unity which it originally sought to criticize. Thus, even though there is an other, the other actually turns out to be the self. We remind ourselves that Hegelian *eros* always emphasizes lack and therefore returns the self to the self, albeit via the other. Hegel's Absolute is an Erotic Absolute, in the sense that *Eros* becomes the bastard child and forgets the *Poros* father. There is only lack in Hegelian dialectics.⁸⁸

If Hegelian dialectic avoids asymmetry and mystery, and grants no form of an agapeic otherness,⁸⁹ one must ask how does Desmond recapitulate dialectics in his philosophical method.

The dialectical sense, criticizes univocal unity...and even though it too criticizes the limits of univocal unity, dialectical thinking still tries to mediate equivocal difference....But the dialectical sense of being shows an ambiguous tendency to

⁸⁵ Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 127.

⁸⁶ Desmond, *PO*, 11.

⁸⁷ See Desmond, *HG*, 4

⁸⁸ "Dialectic, then, arises in response to lack of articulate identity...What presents itself to desire at this point is the possibility of *an* end but not *the* end, a possible whole but not *the* whole....we can think of ourselves as possible wholes without confusing ourselves with *the* whole; we may discover an absolute dimension to our beings without regarding ourselves as *the* absolute." *DDO*, 125.

⁸⁹ "But there is no asymmetry in Hegel." Desmond, *BB*, 249. "There are no final mysteries for Hegel's dialectical concept." Desmond, *PU*, 50.

interpret all mediation primarily in terms of self-mediation...this tends to happen with Hegel.⁹⁰

Dialectic is a useful tool for mediating differences. However, we see with Hegel's system that it has the tendency to become a *self*-mediated system where otherness is excluded and the system becomes totalizing. Desmond is not opposed to dialectic, however, he encourages that "we must rethink it in terms that do not sacrifice idiotic singularity"⁹¹ as Hegel does,⁹² recalling that idiotic singularity is a healthy univocity which contains within it the patience of being. And at this point, it is pertinent to realize that this is precisely how Bonhoeffer critiqued Hegel,

The tragedy of all idealist philosophy was that it never ultimately broke through to personal spirit. However, its monumental perception, especially in Hegel, was that the principle of spirit is something objective, extending beyond everything individual—that there is an objective spirit, the spirit of sociality, which is distinct in itself from all individual spirit. Our task is to affirm the latter without denying the former, to retain perception without committing the error.⁹³

Bonhoeffer, like Desmond, affirms an objective spirit of sociality, à la Hegel, while never denying the individual, personal spirit, as was tragically the case with Hegel's absolute. Bonhoeffer essentially combined the thoughts of Hegel and Kierkegaard, so as to affirm a spirit of sociality and individuality. In other words, Hegelian dialectic does not contain any elements of the *passio essendi* or healthy anxiety, for it is entirely self-determining where there is no birthing-with, but rather, only self-birth. As Bonhoeffer wrote, "the I understands itself from itself within a closed system."⁹⁴

As one can see, dialectic is closely connected with T2 and can lead to an erotic absolute if the antinomy of transcendence and autonomy is ignored because of impatience. We ought to remind ourselves that neither Desmond nor Bonhoeffer are not opposed to dialectic. The hermeneutic of the *passio essendi* reveals both Desmond's and Bonhoeffer's misgivings toward Hegelian dialectic, in that it fails to be true to the self and true to the other.

⁹⁰ Desmond, *PO*, 4.

⁹¹ Desmond, *PU*, 63.

⁹² See Desmond, *PU*, 59.

⁹³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *DBWE 01, Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, ed. Clifford Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), *DBWE* 1:74.

⁹⁴ Bonhoeffer, *A and B*, *DBWE* 2:76. See "Thinking is in itself a closed circle, with the ego as the center" *DBW* 10:424.

When there is a patience of being and tolerance, we do not arrive at the *erotic absolute*, rather we come to experience *erotic selving*; that is, the counterpoint in the polyphony of life. Erotic selving does not forget the *cantus firmus* or that there is a hyperbolic excess which comes from the enabling milieu of being out of agapeic gifting. Therefore, greater unity does exist in the dialectical erotics of selving and it does not sacrifice the idiocy of being. It is a unity *without separation, to borrow the phraseology from Chalcedon*. In having this new unity, the discourse of the between must now progress as a way of maintaining a fidelity to the other. To this we now turn.

The Agapeics of Community

Desmond described a healthy dialectic as a corrective to Hegel, but this healthy dialectic is not the end. If one can call the dialectical erotics of selving a positive *unity without separation*, Desmond's metaxological agapeics of community maintains fidelity to otherness in that it cultivates a rich sense of positive *difference*—without confusion—to compliment this unity.⁹⁵ The metaxological is not better than the univocal, equivocal, or dialectical, rather it is simply another sense of being. Desmond says it best as follows: "I suggest that as dialectic tries to redeem the *promise of univocity* beyond equivocity, so the metaxological tries to redeem the *promise of equivocity* beyond univocity and dialectic."⁹⁶

Metaxology is the promise of equivocity, the "without confusion" (to borrow more Chalcedonian terminology). The etymology of the word metaxology derives from the Greek *metaxu* and *logos*, thus it is a discourse of the between.⁹⁷ We can see that the etymology is certainly hinting at this positive difference, *the promise of equivocity*. Etymology alone does not help us understand what Desmond is communicating by this word though.

Desmond goes on to "define the metaxological sense of being in dynamic interrelation to the three other senses: namely, the *univocal*, the *equivocal*, and the *dialectical* senses of being."⁹⁸ If the promise of equivocity is defined in dynamic interrelation to the other three, it must mean that the other three are necessarily "good," at least in some sense. This has been communicated with the *passio essendi* preceding the *conatus essendi* in the form of the univocal idiocy of being,

⁹⁵ See Desmond, *DDO*, 123.

⁹⁶ Desmond, *BB*, 178. Emphasis mine.

⁹⁷ Desmond, *PO*, 3.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

the equivocal aesthetics of happening, and the dialectical erotics of selving. "It is a mindful *passio essendi* prior to and presupposed by every *conatus essendi* of the mind desiring to understand this or that."⁹⁹ In the patience of being there has been (co)birthed healthy children of idiocy, aesthetics, erotics and agapeics. These four are "signs in immanence of what transcends immanence and cannot be fully determined in immanent terms."¹⁰⁰

Metaxology is a celebration feast of sameness, otherness, a unity of the otherness, and a community of wholes.¹⁰¹ It would be a misnomer to perceive metaxology as being opposed to univocal sameness, equivocal otherness, and dialectical unity. The metaxological arises from the univocal while being true to the self and the other, proceeds to the equivocal and maintains its fidelity to the self and other because of the *passio essendi*, and in fidelity to the self and other, shows that a metaxological promise of equivocality as a community of wholes is needed to compliment the dialectical promise of univocity. The only way to have a metaxological community of wholes is to have an overdetermined abundance. Each of these four senses of beings is just that, a sense of being. These senses of being are granted from the overdetermined excess. As Aristotle said, "being is said in many ways"¹⁰² and the metaxological shows us that the patience of being allows for being to be spoken in many ways. This does not mean that Desmond has a cap on metaphysics, and he reminds us that the fourfold senses of being "help define the truth of the metaxological, but we risk error when they are absolutized and claimed to cover the entire milieu of being."¹⁰³ We must avoid making the metaxological absolute, learning our lesson from the way in which Hegel made the dialectical absolute.

Being Responsible in the Between

Bonhoeffer's Pragmatic Fourfold

From my reading of Bonhoeffer, I view him as incredibly pragmatic, whereas Desmond appears to be more concerned with correct thinking (that being said, Desmond is also pragmatic while Bonhoeffer is also concerned with correct thinking, it is simply a matter of emphases as to how I read them both). What

⁹⁹ Desmond, *ISB*, 264.

¹⁰⁰ Desmond, *GB*, 8.

¹⁰¹ In other words, metaxology "tries to name the mediation between a plurality of wholes." Desmond, *DDO*, 124.

¹⁰² Desmond, *BB*, 34.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, xii.

I mean to infer is that when it comes to the fourfold senses of being, Desmond does an astounding job of describing all the interrelated connections; however, Bonhoeffer was able to make the connection with the concrete lived reality far more clearly than Desmond has communicated thus far. The following is from Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*,

*The commandment of God revealed in Jesus Christ is addressed to us in the church, in the family, in work, and in government. [...] None of these authorities can identify itself alone with the commandment of God. The sovereignty of the commandment of God proves itself precisely in ordering these authorities in a relationship of being [1] with each other, [2] beside each other, [3] together with each other, and [4] over against each other.*¹⁰⁴

When Bonhoeffer referred to church, family, work, and government, these are what he referred to as “orders of preservation” or “divine mandates,” as opposed to “orders of creation.” On occasion, he also labeled culture and marriage as mandates. But in other writings he could loosely identify a concept, such as “struggle,” as an order of preservation. In Bonhoefferian studies, labeling “what” the orders of preservation (or mandates) often takes precedent over the way *being*. This is sensed through the interrelatedness between the mandates. However, I am of the conviction that the most important aspect of the mandates was their fourfold interrelation. The following table neatly demonstrates how Desmond's fourfold senses of being, which are interpreted through the *passio essendi*, are correlated with the way in which Bonhoeffer's mandates interact with one another.

Desmond	Fourfold	Bonhoeffer
Idiocy of Being	Univocal	Being with each other
Aesthetics of Happening	Equivocal	Being beside each other
Erotics of Serving	Dialectical	Being together with each other
Agapeics of Community	Metaxological	Being over-against each other

I have previously affirmed that metaxology is a celebration feast of sameness (being with each other), otherness (being beside each other), a unity of the otherness (being together with each other), and a community of wholes (being over against each other). However, one must be mindful that being a responsible

¹⁰⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *DBWE 06, Ethics*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Charles West Reinhard Krauss and Douglas Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), DBWE 6:380. Abbreviated title: *E*.

community of wholes does not mean submission in se, rather, it actually affirms resistance, when necessary. Concretely, one could thus infer that “church” (a mandate), while it does stand *dialectically together with* “government” (a mandate), there are times, however, when “church” must stand *metaxologically over-against* the “government.” Government is not an unmovable order of creation, but merely one of preservation, and there are times when it needs to be resisted.¹⁰⁵ This goes in both directions, and applies to all of the mandates. And only by applying it in all directions, to all the mandates, is one being responsible in the between.

At this point it is noteworthy to mention that the *Letters and Papers from Prison* are actually entitled “Resistance and Submission” in German (*Widerstand und Ergebung*). And in them, Bonhoeffer often gives reference to the Spanish novel, *The Ingenious Nobleman Sir Quixote of La Mancha*, by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra. In this tragicomedy, Don Quixote and his submissive companion, Sancho Panza set out on a crusade together. But what is most pertinent to the story is that Don Quixote represents “resistance” (the promise of equivocity) and Sancho Panza represents “submission” (the promise of univocity), both to unhealthy degrees. And this tying together of resistance and submission is where Bonhoeffer provides pragmatic clarification over and above Desmond. For again, Bonhoeffer’s forth sense of being is *being over against each other*. In fact, “where *being-over-against-one-another* is no longer present, God’s mandate no longer exist.”¹⁰⁶ An “agapeics of community” could lead one to believe that it leads to an illusory utopian existence where resistance is no longer necessary, but Bonhoeffer’s formulation dispels these falsehoods. However, even though resistance is affirmed, there is still a matter of allowing the self to die. To which we now turn. (Bonhoeffer’s literal hanging for political treason illustrates this point better than any words on the issue.)

Learning How to Die

As mentioned earlier, metaxology is a hermeneutic of *passio essendi*, where one is resurrected to excessive astonishment in one’s *dying*. In patiently waiting, God as over-being reveals the overdetermined hyperbolic signs in immanence of

¹⁰⁵ For instance, when the Nazi government forced the Aryan clause upon Jewish members in the church, Bonhoeffer rightly declared this to be a state of confession. And in the years that followed, he continued to resist his government, to the point of being hanged for political treason.

¹⁰⁶ Bonhoeffer, *E*, DBWE 6:394.

transcendence which are often sensed to be idiotic, aesthetic, erotic, and agapeic. If astonishment is birthed by patience, then one may say that impatience kills astonishment. "A new patience of being is needed."¹⁰⁷ The irony is that the *passio essendi* itself is a suffering death, but it gives birth to life. Patiently waiting returns one to zero, to nothing.¹⁰⁸

Desmond refers many times throughout his writings to what he refers to as "posthumous mind."¹⁰⁹ He uses a thought experiment, taken in part from Dostoyevsky's near death experience, recorded in *The Idiot*, before the firing squad. The thought experiment is to imagine your own death, and then to imagine coming back from the grave to live life anew. Dostoyevsky (in the name of Prince Myshkin) shows the desire to live life anew and not waste a single moment, yet at the same time, he acknowledges the tension that in reality it is *impossible* to carry out in practice. When facing the firing squad, we want to live anew, however, we immediately forget this feeling when granted reprieve. Desmond believes that it is exactly in dying in this way, again and again, that one is able to resurrect astonishment. The resurrected astonishment is practiced through living the fourfold senses of being with mindfulness and fidelity to the *passio essendi*.¹¹⁰

What might happen if metaxological mindfulness set at naught the dualistic opposition of self and other? Since the other would not then be radically opposed, you would have the simple pouring forth of benevolence, perhaps even the foolishness of turning the cheek....You might be either a dead man or a child, or if the latter, forgiveness and forget would quickly follow every hurt.¹¹¹

Desmond's thought experiment does not truly teach one *how* to die and be reborn with metaxological mindfulness, even though he does suggest the idea of turning the other cheek and offering forgiveness for every hurt. (He does not seem to leave much room for resistance.) Desmond's metaphysics encourages one to have a tolerant and faithful discourse of the between, between self and others, sameness and otherness, inseparability and distinction, though it does

¹⁰⁷ Desmond, *GB*, 33.

¹⁰⁸ "Suppose the return to zero were a death in that sense, that is, also a promise of rebirth, beyond all will to power? Posthumous mind would then entail a second astonishment before the agape of being." Desmond, *GB*, 32.

¹⁰⁹ For instance, here are some of the instances of when Desmond speaks of posthumous mind: PO 278ff., 300, 304ff., 368-369; BB 36-37, 40, 43, 44, 192-93, 199, 200, 230, 264, 503; PU 44, 53, 111, 163, 164, etc.

¹¹⁰ See Desmond, *ISB*, 264 and *GB*, 33-35.

¹¹¹ Desmond, *PO*, 310.

not appear to equip real-people with the humility or actual death which is required to accomplish this. In one sense, and I say this cautiously, Bonhoeffer may have critiqued Desmond in the same way he did Hegel, that is, “Hegel wrote a philosophy of angels, but not of human beings...”¹¹² In a sense, Bonhoeffer turns out to be more metaxological than Desmond. For Bonhoeffer, the posthumous mind—death as a thought experiment—would not have gone far enough. For Bonhoeffer, “Every time Christ calls, one is led into death.”¹¹³ It is an actual death, not simply a thought experiment. However, when one examines Bonhoeffer’s theology-of-the-cross, one always comes face-to-face with the *life, death, and glorious resurrection* of Christ. This is because he always applied “the triadic dynamic of the new humanity in Christ (incarnated, judged, resurrected) to the world.”¹¹⁴ The follower of Christ truly participates in Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, and because of this, Bonhoeffer could paradoxically conclude, “It is certain that...our life is hidden in death.”¹¹⁵ It is only by truly participating in Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, that one may be truly resurrected to both astonishment and perplexity, and thus live responsibly in the between. There is no being responsible apart from being conformed to the form of Christ.¹¹⁶

Desmond’s metaphysics has shown us that there is a way to have a tolerant and faithful discourse of the between, between self and others, sameness and otherness, inseparability and distinction. Bonhoeffer’s theology-of-the-cross shows one how to be responsible in the between by fully participating in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, here and now. And more so than Desmond, Bonhoeffer helps us realize that this does not mean a utopian existence, but one of conformation with and toward Christ.

In first describing the theologian-of-the-cross, Martin Luther wrote in Thesis 20 of the Heidelberg Disputation, to be a theologian-of-the-cross means to view all things “through suffering and the cross.” The metaxological philosopher and the theologian-of-the-cross help each other realize that the *passio essendi* always comes before the *co-natus essendi*, suffering before co-birth, death before resurrection glory, *Good Friday before Easter Sunday*. If one is able faithfully

¹¹² Bonhoeffer, *A and B*, DBWE 2:42.

¹¹³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *DBWE 04, Discipleship*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), DBWE 4:87. Translation altered.

¹¹⁴ Jens Zimmermann, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Heidegger: Two Different Visions of Humanity,” in *Bonhoeffer and Continental Thought: Cruciform Philosophy*, ed. Brian Gregor and Jens Zimmermann (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), 104.

¹¹⁵ Bonhoeffer, *LPP*, DBWE 8:514. Translation altered.

¹¹⁶ Bonhoeffer, *E*, DBWE 6:76-102.

maintain the *passio essendi* by viewing all things “through suffering and the cross,” one will be responsible in the between. The challenge for theologians is to appropriate this towards contemporary matters which bring forth questions of identity and difference, such as, but certainly not limited to, ecumenism and interreligious dialogue.

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